

83117 - Can Apostasy Be Forgiven Multiple Times?

the question

Soorat An-Nisa' states that Allah will not accept the Islam of one who commits Kufr three times, and will never guide him. Does that include not praying three times, for example?.

Summary of answer

According to the correct scholarly opinion, the repentance of one who has apostatised repeatedly is to be accepted, and he comes under the same rulings as any other Muslim.

Detailed answer

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The Mercy of Allah in Accepting Repentance

The important principle that Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, confirms in His revelation and states that it is the foundation of reckoning and the criterion of reward and punishment, is that [repentance wipes out whatever came before it](#) , and that Islam erases all that came before it; the gate of [repentance is open to every individual](#) , even if he falls into sin and disbelief time after time. The grace and mercy of Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, towards His slaves decrees that He should accept the repentance of the one who repents and forgive him his sins.

Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): {Say to those who have disbelieved, if they cease (from disbelief), their past will be forgiven.} [Al-Anfal 8:38]

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Do you not know that Islam destroys whatever came before it, and that Hijrah destroys whatever came before it, and that Hajj destroys whatever came before it?” (Narrated by Muslim, 121)

What the Quran and Hadith Say about Repeated Apostasy

There are also verses which indicate that the [repentance of the apostate](#) , if he comes back to Islam and repents sincerely, is accepted. Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their Belief and after they bore witness that the Messenger (Muhammad) is true and after clear proofs had come unto them? And Allah guides not the people who are Dhalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers).

They are those whose recompense is that on them (rests) the Curse of Allah, of the angels, and of all mankind

They will abide therein (Hell). Neither will their torment be lightened, nor will it be delayed or postponed (for a while).”

And yet after all that, Allah, may He be Glorified, says:

{Except for those who repent after that and do righteous deeds. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.} [Al `Imran 3:86-88, 89]

But if a person apostatises and then goes further in disbelief and wrongdoing, and he does not repent or come back to Islam, this is the one to whom the verse in Surat An-Nisa’ –which the questioner mentioned – refers, and the verses from Al `Imran also indicate that his repentance will not be accepted.

Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Verily, those who disbelieved after their Belief and then went on increasing in their disbelief (i.e. disbelief in the Quran and in Prophet Muhammad) — never will their repentance be accepted (because they repent only by their tongues and not from their hearts). And they are

those who are astray. Verily, those who disbelieved, and died while they were disbelievers, the (whole) earth full of gold will not be accepted from anyone of them even if they offered it as a ransom. For them is a painful torment and they will have no helpers.} [Al `Imran 3:90-91]

And He says:

{Verily, those who believe, then disbelieve, then believe (again), and (again) disbelieve, and go on increasing in disbelief; Allah will not forgive them, nor guide them on the (right) way.} [An-Nisa' 4:137]

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Adhim (1/753):

Here Allah tells us about the one who enters Islam and then recants, then comes back to it, then recants and persists in his misguidance, and increases in it until he dies: there is no repentance after his death and Allah will not forgive him or grant him any way out from what he is in, and there is no way he could be guided. Hence He says: "Allah will not forgive them, nor guide them on the (right) way." Ibn Abu Hatim said: ... It was narrated that Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said concerning the verse, "and go on increasing in disbelief": They persist in their disbelief until they die. This was also the view of Mujahid. (End quote)

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmu` Al-Fatawa (16/28-29):

Concerning these whose repentance will not be accepted, there were several opinions:

It was said that it is because of their hypocrisy, or because they repented from sins less grave than shirk but did not repent from shirk, or it was said that their repentance would never be accepted after death. But the majority, such as Al-Hasan, Qatadah, `Ata', Al-Khurasani and As-Suddi said: Their repentance will never be accepted when death comes to them. So this is like the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): {And of no effect is the repentance of those who continue to do evil deeds until death faces one of them and he says: 'Now I repent,' nor of those who die while they are disbelievers"} [An-Nisa' 4:18]

And the same applies to the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Verily, those who believe, then disbelieve, then believe (again), and (again) disbelieve, and go on increasing in disbelief; Allah will not forgive them, nor guide them on the (right) way,} [An-Nisa’ 4:137]

Mujahid and other commentators said: “and go on increasing in disbelief” means, they remain steadfast in that until they die.

I [Ibn Taymiyah] say: That is because the one who repents is giving up kufr, whereas the one who does not repent is persisting in it and adding disbelief to disbelief. The words “and go on increasing in disbelief” are like saying, they persisted in disbelief and continued in disbelief and remained in disbelief. So they became disbelievers after becoming Muslim, then their disbelief increased and did not grow less. The repentance of these people will not be accepted, referring to their repentance when they are dying, because the one who repents before death comes has repented soon enough and recanted his disbelief, so it did not increase; rather it decreased, unlike the one who persisted in kufr until the time of death. (End quote)

Scholarly Interpretations on Repeated Apostasy

There is no difference of opinion among the scholars that [if the apostate repents sincerely](#) and comes back to Islam, Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, will accept him and forgive him for what is past, even if he has apostatized repeatedly.

This is with regard to Allah in the Hereafter.

The Ruling on Execution for Repeated Apostasy

As for the rulings in this world, some of the scholars said that if a person apostatises repeatedly he should be executed and his repentance not accepted. The difference of opinion among the scholars about [accepting repentance](#) has to do with rulings in this world only and does not have to do with a person’s standing before Allah in the Hereafter, may He be Glorified and Exalted.

Ibn Qudamah said in Al-Mughni (12/271):

To sum up, the difference of opinion among the imams concerning the acceptance of their repentance has to do with rulings in this world, not executing them, and affirming that they should be treated as Muslims.

As to whether Allah accepts their repentance and forgives the one who repents and gives up (apostasy) both inwardly and outwardly, there is no difference of opinion concerning that. (End quote)

Ibn Taymiyah's View on Repeated Apostasy and Repentance

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmu' Al-Fatawa, 30/16:

When the jurists differed concerning the acceptance of the repentance of one who apostatises repeatedly and the acceptance of the repentance of the heretic, that only has to do with the ruling on outward appearances, because the repentance of such people cannot be trusted. But if he is sincere in his heart towards Allah in his repentance then he is included in the words of Allah (interpretation of the meaning): "Say: "O `Ibadi (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" [Al-Zumar 39:53].

According to the correct scholarly opinion, the repentance of one who has apostatised repeatedly is to be accepted with regard to rulings in this world too, and he comes under the same rulings as any other Muslim. This is the view of the majority of Hanafi and Shafa'i scholars and is the well-known view among the Malikis, and is the second of the two views of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. (See Hashiyat Tabyin Al-Haqa'iq, 3/284; Fat-h Al-Qadir, 6/68; Al-Insaf, 10/332-335; Tuhfat Al-Muhtaj, 9/69; Kashshaf Al-Qina', 6/177-178; Al-Mawsu'ah Al-Fiqhiyyah, 14/127-128. In Al-Mabsut (10/99-100) it is attributed to `Ali and Ibn `Umar that they did not accept the repentance of one who had apostatised repeatedly.

Based on that, the repentance of one who had given up prayer is acceptable if he is sincere, even if he repeatedly gave up prayer, but he should beware, because death may come before he is able to repent and Allah may cause his punishment to come in this world before the Hereafter.

We ask Allah to bestow upon us and you His great mercy.

And Allah knows best.